

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I come to the House floor today to express my concern over the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which is designed to transport oil from the Caspian Sea. This pipeline has been in the planning stages for years, but this year ground was actually broken for the pipeline in Azerbaijan. The proponents of this pipeline have touted its numerous benefits in recent years, but last month an Amnesty International report identified major problems that I would like to address this evening.

Amnesty International's report, Human Rights on the Line, is a thorough and convincing look at how large oil companies put the business of oil over the lives of those that stand in the way of its delivery. The executive director of Amnesty International, Dr. William Shultz, recently blasted the consortium, led by British Petroleum, that is financing the pipeline.

He said, "While BP claims to be socially responsible as the leader of the BCT consortium, it has essentially encouraged the Turkish Government to sign away its ability to fully uphold human rights."

Mr. Speaker, in contractual agreements between companies and governments, human rights should not be negotiable.

In their report, Amnesty International cited five main areas of concern with the pipeline project. They argue that the contract signed between British Petroleum and the Turkish Government, known as the Host Government Agreement, places the business agreement above human rights, and this agreement will violate the principles of human rights in five ways.

First, a land grab by the Governments of Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan along the route of the pipeline. Over 30,000 people who live in villages and farmland along the path will be permanently displaced without their having any input into the decision or receiving any compensation.

Second, little to no enforcement of health and safety legislation in each of the three host countries for the workers and locals that work on and live near the pipeline.

Third, the serious risk to the human rights of any individuals that protest the pipeline's construction. If the local residents protest the construction, they are likely to be brutally suppressed.

Fourth, Mr. Speaker, all the water resources in the vicinity of the pipeline will be used for its construction. Local residents and their farms and livestock will face a severe water shortage as a result, and their water supply is also likely to be seriously polluted from the construction.

Fifth, the agreement that Turkey and British Petroleum signed actually creates an economic disincentive to uphold human rights. The text of the agreement states that Turkey has to pay compensation to British Petroleum for not meeting construction deadlines.

The Turkish Government would almost be forced to ignore the basic concerns of its population in order to meet deadlines set by the oil companies.

Mr. Speaker, I plan to bring the Amnesty International report on the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline to the attention of our Congress and our Caucus on Armenian Issues. We will ask the authors of the report to present their findings to the Armenian Caucus in the coming weeks.

This practice of sacrificing the things we hold dear for 10 to 20 years of oil cannot continue. How much of the environment are we willing to destroy? How many of our basic human rights will we continue to hand over to the oil companies?

Mr. Speaker, lastly, the U.S. Government, in my opinion, should certainly not provide any economic incentive for this pipeline until a thorough review of the human rights and ecological problems is completed.

GRANTING SALES TAX DEDUCTION ON FEDERAL TAX RETURNS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, in 1999 I began battling imposition of a State income tax in Tennessee. Our State spent 4 years debating the ability of government to levy new taxes and the meaning of tax fairness. The battle was long, and it engaged virtually every taxpayer in Tennessee. At the end of the day, those that supported the State income tax lost. Tennessee stood up and said enough is enough, and they rejected a massive tax increase.

Traveling through our beautiful State, I met people in city halls, people in coffee shops, and I gained tremendous appreciation for what those patriots must have felt when they dumped the tea into the Boston Harbor during the Boston Tea Party. I really continue to take heart in the way average citizens, people who have really never taken an interest in politics, the way they have become marching, sign-waving, horn-honking activists, and the way they have united against another tax increase.

With the defeat of a State income tax in Tennessee, I came to Washington prepared to work for legislation that would allow citizens of States without a State income tax the right to deduct the sales tax from their Federal income tax filings. Right now, if you pay State income taxes, you can deduct those payments on your Federal returns, but if you only pay sales tax, you cannot deduct it, and that is unfair.

The Nation's Tax Code effectively punishes States without an income tax, States like Tennessee, Texas, Florida, Washington, Wyoming and South Dakota.

Mr. Speaker, there are more than 53 million people that live in States that do not have a State income tax. That is nearly 20 percent of our entire population. I want to say that one more time. There are nearly 53 million people that live in States without a State income tax. That is nearly 20 percent of our entire population. And these people are being penalized every single year when they fill out their Federal income tax filing. All of these people have been or will be taxpayers, and they deserve tax fairness.

America's seniors would also be supportive of this effort. There are millions of seniors in this country. Many probably do not have a great deal of State income tax payments to deduct on their Federal returns, but they certainly have State sales tax payments. So the support is clear. There are millions of Americans in States across the Nation who want and deserve this deduction.

Mr. Speaker, I have made this a priority. I have worked very closely with the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BRADY), the gentlewoman from Wyoming (Mrs. CUBIN), the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. DUNN), and our majority leader the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY). I have testified before the Committee on Ways and Means on this issue, and I have taken every opportunity to talk to Members and work with Members on both sides of the aisle on this most important issue.

The sweat is paying off. Today the New York Times drew attention to this issue and pointed to this House's engagement on the effort. There have been articles in papers across Tennessee, Florida, Washington, and the list goes on and on. The word is spreading. We are closer than ever before to winning passage of a sales tax deduction, but the time is not here for celebration. It is time to put our noses to the grindstone and work to find the right vehicle for the sales tax deduction.

The momentum is building, and it is time for fairness for the people who live in States without a State income tax. They deserve this deduction, and it is time for them to have it.

GROWING CONCERNS ABOUT U.S. POLICY IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, over the past few days and weeks, an increasing number of my constituents have contacted me to express serious questions and growing concerns about U.S. policy in Iraq. I, too, have questions, and I share their concerns.

For example, in the months since U.S. forces invaded Iraq, overthrew Saddam Hussein and his government, and gained control of the country, no weapons of mass destruction have been found, despite repeated assertions by